

Criminal Damage To A Community Centre

*A 15 year old boy smashed the windows of
a Community Centre whilst under the
influence of alcohol*

John was a slim built 15 year old schoolboy. He was the youngest of three, having two older sisters. His mother – a single parent – was supportive of John, but expressed embarrassment and disappointment following John's offence. John's school attendance had been poor and he was currently working to a reduced timetable with the Student Support Service. John had no previous offending history. One evening John had been drinking strong lager with some friends in a local park. John described himself as being 'quite drunk' by the time he and his friends left the park and walked towards the local Community Centre. John saw an empty beer crate near to the Community Centre. He picked the crate up and threw it towards one of the Community Centre windows, smashing it. John then staggered away with his friends.

Arrest

A short time later, the Police (as a result of information received by local residents, who could positively identify him) arrested John. John fully admitted the offence and could offer no explanation as to why he had done it, other than the fact that he was very drunk. John was charged with Criminal Damage, and received an 18 hour Reparation Order from the Court. The Youth Offending Team worker responsible for supervising John with his reparation hours began with a session of leaflet dropping for the local YWCA.

Apology

During this time they talked about his offence, and John asked the worker whether it would be possible to apologise face-to-face to the Community Centre Manager instead of, or as well as, a letter of apology. The worker then contacted the Restorative Justice Worker in the Youth Offending Team. John was visited at home with the reparation worker. John's mum was also present. John expressed regret and remorse for his actions and repeated his wish to apologise to the Community Centre Manager. John's mother was supportive of her son's wishes and agreed to be present should such a meeting take place. Contact was made with Lucy, the Community Centre Manager and Youth Worker. Lucy agreed to a meeting after the principles of Restorative Justice had been explained to her. It was felt that both parties would benefit from a Restorative Conference. The meeting was arranged for a morning the following week in the main hall of the Community Centre. Approximately 2 hours had been spent with each participant and half an hour with John's mum. At the meeting Lucy seemed composed and focused. John, and particularly his mother, Jackie, appeared nervous. The Youth Offending Service Reparation Worker was present with the permission of all parties. After

introductions, and an explanation about the purpose of the meeting, it was explained that the conference was the result of a direct request from John, and he was invited to give his account of events leading up to, during, and after the offence. During this explanation, John took full responsibility for his actions, expressed appropriate remorse and ended with a sincere apology. Lucy, clearly moved, thanked John for showing the courage to participate in the conference, and accepted his apology. Lucy then went on to explain the consequences of John's offence. She began by describing the inconvenience of being called out late at night by the Police, and having to wait until the building had been secured. Lucy then talked about the financial impact and the effect on insurance premiums etc, and also the time spent clearing broken glass inside the Centre. At this point Lucy pointed out that the Community Centre was a focal point for all members of the community (which included John) to come together and to enjoy leisure activities. This centre was very much a part of John and his family's community. It was then the turn of John's mother, who began by apologising to Lucy for her son's behaviour. She gave an emotional account of her feelings of embarrassment and shame when the Police came to her house in the early hours of the morning to tell her that John had been arrested. She described the inconvenience caused trying to arrange a babysitter for her baby niece whom she was currently caring for. She told the conference that she felt as though she had done something wrong herself whilst acting as an appropriate adult during her son's interview at the Police Station. She ended her contribution by adding that although she had experienced this shame, she now felt proud that John had been courageous enough to face up to his actions and was trying to repair some of the harm caused.